

# Nine

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## Have Scales, will travel

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This case study examines how an itinerant ESL teacher uses the *ESL Scales* to best meet ESL learners' needs within the limited time available.

The ESL Scales provide a focus for accurately assessing each student's areas of competence as well as their needs, which can then be programmed for with confidence. Reporting to classroom teachers poses problems for an itinerant ESL teacher. The ESL Scales have helped alleviate some of these problems by providing a framework for systematic reporting of student progress in English.

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### Appendices

- 9.1 Overview: ESL Scales Level 1 Reading and Responding
- 9.2 ESL Programming
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- 9.4 (a) ESL Student Report: Oral Interaction
- 9.4 (b) ESL Student Report: Reading and Responding
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- 9.5 ESL Student Report for Parents and Caregivers

## Context

I am appointed to an itinerant ESL position working in country NSW. I have been in the job, first part-time and then full-time, for about three years. It is quite challenging as I have approximately 44 ESL students in seven schools, geographically spread over a 45 km distance.

Schools are scheduled between one to six sessions (around one and a half hours per session) per week, depending on need. I only teach Phase 1 and Phase 2 students, organised in the main on a group withdrawal basis simply because of the logistics of accessing 44 students across 32 classrooms.

Timetabling classes is difficult as I have to take into account factors for each class such as sport, library, computer, assembly, RFF, etc.

As I am also the only ESL teacher in schools in my district, I sometimes act in a consultancy capacity to advise schools with ESL students.

I have been teaching ESL for three years. Prior to this I was a full-time class teacher in both large and small schools as well as a LOTE teacher of two languages. It was in seeking direction and information as a new ESL teacher that I learned of the ESL Scales, then in draft form; they immediately gave me the focus for my work. I could see that I had been doing a number of things correctly but there were areas that I was not covering. The ESL Scales helped me to locate these areas and then program for them.

## Why I use the ESL Scales

For me, the most important reason for using the ESL Scales is that it makes my life a whole lot easier. Initially, it did take time to familiarise myself with the document and find a workable system but now my job is much easier because I use them. They give me a clear basis for programming, assessing and reporting.

I use the ESL Scales because ESL teaching is such a multi-faceted job. It is easy to get carried away in some areas and neglect others. By using the ESL Scales I ensure that my ESL program covers all the areas on which I need to focus.

Because of the nature of my itinerant ESL position and the small amount of time I spend in each school, documentation is vital. I must document clearly at the end of each learning session what I have achieved with my students and what we will move onto next, as I will certainly have forgotten by the time I get back to them the next week. By using the ESL Scales I can document easily and simply what I have done and have a clear direction for the next lesson.

The ESL Scales also give ESL teachers a clear, common knowledge base with which to communicate with other teachers.

## Initial assessment

Initial ESL assessment of students is mainly done through observation and analysis of work samples. When a new student arrives at a school I talk to them, perhaps play a communicative game and usually ask them to write a recount about a personal experience. I also ask them to read a short text. Using all the information I have gathered I then refer to the ESL Scales pointers and place the students on a level according to what they are able to do. Sometimes, once I know the student better, I have to adjust the initial assessment but it provides a reasonably accurate starting point for ESL support.

## Using the ESL Scales to program

My program has seven sections, one for each school I teach in. Within each school I have grouped the students according to their levels on the ESL Scales. For example, at one school with seven students, three learners (Group 1) are working at Oral Interaction Level 2–3, Reading and Responding Level B2–B3, Writing Level B2–B3 and so are grouped together for withdrawal and programming. The other four students at this school (Group 2) are working at Oral Level 3–4, Reading Level 2–3, Writing Level 2–3.

I usually begin by selecting a topic from any key learning area (KLA), depending on student needs at the time. I also take into account feedback from class teachers who let me know specific skills that students need to work on. Once the topic has been chosen I go to the ESL Scales to see which pointers at the students' levels would fit appropriately with the topic. I have photocopied sections of the ESL Scales for each school I work in, so I then highlight the pointers that the group will focus on (see Appendix 9.1).

I give each group a colour, e.g. Group 1 is pink and Group 2 is yellow. I highlight the pointers that the group is working on in their colour and then tick the same pointer with black pen when it has been achieved.

I write the pointers for focus into the program of work, with activities to facilitate their achievement. The proforma for programming (Appendix 9.2(a) & (b)) shows the areas in which I make records for each unit of work. These include a Unit Focus, ESL Outcomes, Communicative Activities, Reading Skills and Writing Skills, Self-esteem Activities. These are explained in more detail below.

### Unit Focus

The unit focus is usually literature, but can be literature relating to any KLA (including the language of Maths.) I try to choose literature that includes:

- traditional tales and nursery rhymes as ESL children usually aren't familiar with these and they are referred to often in everyday life
- stories with lots of Australian content
- literature from the students' cultures to enable them to identify with the content and allow them to bring previous knowledge to class activities.

I always choose books that contain a lot of picture support for the students and we scaffold all texts carefully so that students have a clear understanding of the meanings and tasks involved.

I also program small units of work to cover particular areas of student need, e.g. if a student needs assistance with the language of maths.

### **ESL Outcomes**

These are chosen according to the students' level of English and the Unit Focus. The number of pointers I focus on varies according to the nature of the pointer, student readiness and how much work is necessary to achieve them. In one unit of work I may only focus on achieving three or four pointers but in other units I may be able to achieve seven or eight.

I do not think it is necessary for all the pointers for each level to be achieved for the students to 'move on to' the next level. Students may be developing over several levels at one time.

### **Communicative Activities**

I try to organise students into small groups so that they can engage in communicative activities. These are linked to the Unit Focus and can include any activity that will facilitate meaningful communication between the group members. The activities used include: board games, rank ordering, celebrity heads, card games, information gap activities, barrier games and group projects.

### **Reading Skills**

Explicit and systematic teaching of reading is vital for ESL students. My reading program includes teaching reading using modelled, guided and independent reading support, with both factual and literary texts. It also includes the systematic teaching of spelling, grammar, punctuation, phonics and sight words.

Teaching reading using authentic language is also very important and should be incorporated into the reading program, so that spelling, grammar etc. relate to real texts and are not taught in isolation. In teaching reading I use semantic webs extensively to establish common background knowledge for the group with which I am working. I also use a lot of visual support, particularly for beginning readers and writers.

### **Writing Skills**

Writing tasks are also linked to the Unit Focus and the students' experiences and abilities. I try to work through the various text types at age-appropriate levels (Appendix 9.3) to enable students to have the same level of knowledge about written forms as their peers.

I find that controlled modelling is the most effective way to teach writing of specific text types. ESL students require extensive modelling of a text before they are able to move onto joint construction. Joint constructions then allow them to gain confidence before they try individual work.

### **Self-Esteem Activities**

I always include self-esteem activities in every unit of work as I find that ESL students often experience low self-esteem while learning English. This is particularly evident with older children who have been successful learners in their country of origin. They come to school and find very little success particularly when they compare themselves to their peers. In a country town ESL children are also quite isolated because of language and social differences, and often very few people other than their own family speak their home language.

### **Using the ESL Scales to assess achievement**

One of the best things about the ESL Scales is that it gives me a definitive and concrete reference for assessment and reporting. It also gives me specific language to use when speaking to other teachers.

I use the ESL Scales so often in my programming and documentation of student achievement, that assessment is fairly simple. I can look at what students have achieved within their withdrawal group (using the highlighted pointer system) and note this on their assessment record.

In addition I also look at student work samples, identifying progress that has been made. I keep anecdotal notes and do informal assessments as part of a lesson (e.g. I might check students' phonetic awareness within a reading activity asking children to isolate sounds in words within a text.)

### **Using the ESL Scales to report to teachers**

I provide formal reports at the end of each semester that detail where the students are functioning on the ESL Scales (**Appendices 9.4(a), 9.4(b), 9.4(c)**).

I communicate with teachers both formally and informally. Formal communication is through a note at the beginning of each term asking them to let me know what the needs of the children are as well as the topics that they will cover in their class during the term. This allows me to take these things into account when I am programming.

Recently at a conference I met an ESL teacher who had received transfer students from one of my schools. This colleague reported how pleased they were to receive a report about the students' current ESL Scales levels, because they knew exactly where to start teaching.

## **Using the ESL Scales to report to parents**

This has been a difficult area and one I have attempted only recently, and am still working on. The problem is how to convey information to parents with a wide range of literacy skills. I think that as much visual information as possible is important with some written information. The Community Information Officer (NESB) can be called on to assist parents who need further information or clarification. I am currently trialling a draft proforma (Appendix 9.5).

I find it easier to talk to parents informally, but I find that the opportunities to do this are fairly rare, for an Itinerant ESL teacher.

## **Future direction**

I have no doubt that as time goes on I will alter the way I do things to suit changing circumstances and needs. Teachers are always looking for a better way because no system is perfect, but for the moment my system works reasonably well.

In the future I hope to set up some kind of student self-assessment using the ESL Scales. Perhaps this will take the form of a combined assessment by the student and the teacher.

As I am keen to set up a support network for country ESL teachers, I am at present looking at establishing a web site on the Internet that will be more user-friendly than newsletters. I would also like to establish Internet opportunities for my ESL students as this is a perfect way of providing communication in their first language. An ESL site would also be great for ESL students to talk to each other.

## ESL SCALES LEVEL 1 – READING AND RESPONDING

Communication	Language and Cultural Understanding
<p><b>At level 1, a student:</b></p> <p><b>1.5 Gains and shares meaning from hearing and reading short simple texts in structured reading activities.</b></p> <p><b>Evident when students, for example:</b></p> <p>Engage in short, structured reading activities based on simple factual or fictional texts.</p> <p>Follow simple written texts while listening to them read aloud.</p> <p>Show a personal response to a text (role-play, draw a picture).</p> <p>Read words from such familiar contexts as home and school (own name, name of school, street name, logos).</p> <p>Gain basic information from illustrations.</p> <p>Sequence a story, a series of events or a process using pictures or illustrations.</p> <p>Gain basic information from simple visual material such as graphs, diagrams and timetables.</p> <p>Read simple sentences from familiar contexts, such as teacher and student texts.</p>	<p><b>At level 1, a student:</b></p> <p><b>1.6 Brings previous experiences in reading to reading tasks in English.</b></p> <p><b>Evident when students, for example:</b></p> <p>Know that people read for different purposes such as study, information or enjoyment.</p> <p>Know that the purpose of reading is to make sense of print.</p> <p>Show awareness that code-breaking is an important initial stage in reading new text.</p> <p>Show awareness that print in English is read in certain directions (from left to right and from top to bottom of the page).</p> <p>Show awareness that there is a sound/symbol relationship in alphabetic print.</p> <p>Know that thoughts and speech can be represented in writing or in print (ask for something to be written in English).</p>

I give each group a colour, e.g. Group 1 is pink and Group 2 is yellow. I highlight the pointers that the group is working on in their colour and then tick the same pointer with black pen when it has been achieved.

## ESL PROGRAMMING

ESL program title: _____		
School: _____ Term: _____ Week: _____		
Students	Students	Students

UNIT FOCUS	
ESL OUTCOMES	
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES	





## ESL SCALES: TEXT TYPES – SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Form		LEGEND						
		E : Expose						
		T : Teach						
		C : Continue to teach introducing higher skills when appropriate						
		Stage 1			Stage 2		Stage 3	
		K	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>DISCUSSION – Factual</b> • conversations • debates • talk back radio	• newspaper articles • essays • current affairs programs • interview	E	E	E	E	E	T	C
<b>EXPLANATION – Factual</b> • current affairs programs • documentaries • lectures and presentations	• newspaper articles • essays • public speaking • reference articles	E	E	E	E	T	C	C
<b>EXPOSITION – Factual</b> • public speaking • lectures • editorials • essays • complaints	• advertisement • notes for debates • cartoons • posters • invitations	E	E	E	T	C	T	C
<b>REPORT – Factual</b> • reference articles • science articles • text books • character portraits	• descriptions • journals • lectures • school reports • note taking	E	T	C	T	C	T	C
<b>PROCEDURE – Factual</b> • directions • recipes	• stage directions • instructions • science experiments	E	T	C	T	C	T	C
<b>NARRATIVE – Literary</b> • traditional tales, e.g. <i>fairy tales, myths and legends</i> • cautionary tales	• fantasy • realistic stories • science fiction • historical narratives	T	C	C	T	C	T	C
<b>RECOUNT – Factual</b> • news • conversations • current affairs programs • documentaries • meeting minutes	• interviews • public speeches • reference articles • letters • school reports • diaries	T	C	C	T	C	T	C
<b>DRAMA – Literary</b> • refer to separate Scope and Sequence Section								
<b>POETRY – Literary</b> • refer to separate Scope and Sequence Section								

## ESL STUDENT REPORT

Date: _____	School: _____	Class: _____
Name: _____		Age: _____
Country of origin: _____		
Language/s spoken at home: _____		
Class teacher: _____		ESL teacher: _____

Years of schooling in an Australian school: (Tick appropriate years)

K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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Current phase of language development:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
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**ORAL INTERACTION**
**Level 1**

Communicates verbally and non-verbally in simple social and classroom situations, taking cues from immediate context and using gesture, isolated words or well-known formulae.

**Communication**
**Level 6**

Communicates in familiar formal and informal registers, interpreting spoken English mainly at a literal level and organising language and ideas drawn from different sources.

1	2	3	4	5	6
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**Level 1**

Draws on knowledge of how people communicate showing awareness of classroom conventions which involve routine verbal and non-verbal exchanges.

**Language and Cultural Understanding**
**Level 6**

Shows awareness that effective spoken English requires speakers to adapt language according to the perceived needs and expectations of listeners.

1	2	3	4	5	6
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**Level 1**

Shows understanding of some familiar simplified spoken English supported by immediate context and use of few simple formulae or isolated words.

**Language Structures and Features**
**Level 6**

Interprets and creates spoken texts in ways which demonstrate a developing control over subject specific registers.

1	2	3	4	5	6
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**Level 1**

Attends to spoken English and attempts communication, relying on non-verbal and very limited verbal resources.

**Strategies**
**Level 6**

Uses planning and reflection to improve range, fluency and accuracy of oral language.

1	2	3	4	5	6
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Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

## ESL STUDENT REPORT

## READING AND RESPONDING

**Beginning Level 1**

Shows an interest in gaining and sharing meaning from simple visual and written texts in structured reading activities.

**Communication****Level 7**

Evaluates a given text with reference to its validity and quality, justifying own reading of text in relation to the readings of others.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Shows knowledge that print and writing transmit and record messages and stories between people.

**Language and Cultural Understanding****Level 7**

Considers how the reader interacts with the text to construct its meaning.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Handles a book appropriately showing some awareness of conventions of book and print organisation.

**Language Structures and Features****Level 7**

Appraises texts relating own response to analysis of language use and features.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Interacts with texts focusing on visual support to gain meaning.

**Strategies****Level 7**

Uses a repertoire of strategies to access and interpret texts and to monitor own reading.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ESL STUDENT REPORT

## WRITING

**Beginning Level 1**

Communicates messages through symbols, drawings or attempts at writing.

**Communication****Level 7**

Communicates effectively to fulfil the literacy and learning requirements of most writing tasks across the school curriculum.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Shows awareness that speech can be written down and the meaning of written messages remains constant.

**Language and Cultural Understanding****Level 7**

Adapts different aspects of writing to take account of context, purpose and reader.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Engages in writing showing awareness of some basic writing conventions.

**Language Structures and Features****Level 7**

Writes a number of complex texts characterised by a personal style which shows a consistent control over textual features.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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**Beginning Level 1**

Experiments with drawing and writing to produce or reproduce symbols and letter.

**Strategies****Level 7**

Plans, revises and refines writing to enhance its overall impact.

B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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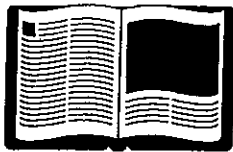
# ESL STUDENT REPORT FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Class teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ ESL teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

## READING



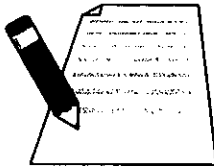
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## WRITING



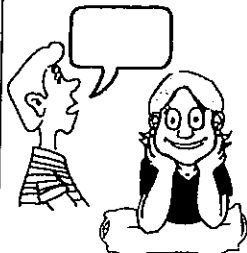
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## SPEAKING AND LISTENING



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